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ABSTRACT

The paper presents a model of counseling outcomes which distinguishes between within-interview change and extra-interview change in order to identify and study the counselor behaviors which constitute strategies or techniques. The author feels that research must: 1.) assess the relative productivity of these behaviors within-strategies in terms of client change within the counseling setting and 2.) clarify how these within-interview outcomes may be used by the client as tools or strategies with which he can operate upon his environment. Another salient feature of this research is its implication for the training of counselors, bringing into focus the relationship between the counselor's behavior and the outcomes of counseling. The author stresses the continuing challenge of relating specific counselor behaviors to the client's improved functioning in his environment. References are included. (Author/SES)

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USE OF COUNSELOR DISCRIMINATIVE STIMULI AS AN INTERVENTION IN EFFECTING CHANGE IN CLIENT OUTCOMES[1]

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Counseling psychologists generally agree that the quality of the relationship between the therapist and the client is a critical factor in determining the outcome of counseling. Numerous studies have been conducted in an attempt to identify and assess the qualitative components of this relationship (Frank, 1958; Truax and Carkhuff, 1965; van der Veen, 1967; Holder, Carkhuff, and Berenson, 1968; Strong and Schmidt, 1970a, 1970b; Schmidt and Strong, 1971). These and many other studies suggest that a relationship does exist between the patient's perceptions of the therapist and the resulting positive effect of the counseling relationship. However, few definitive studies exist that attempt to operationalize the components of the relationship. For the most part we lack specific and objective knowledge of the behaviors that constitute such qualities as empathy, unconditional positive regard, congruence, transparency, attractiveness, expertness, and trustworthiness. Consequently, maintaining consistent levels of the independent variable such as "empathy" must be a sizable problem. Quite possibly, this type of research could lead to a dead end, since the studies tend to focus upon the process and ignore the outcome of counseling.

Operating Assumptions of Various Research Models:

The research efforts and conclusions in counseling are directly affected by the inherent assumptions of the research models. All too often, these assumptions are not examined by the user or by the researcher. Among the several assumptions that are operating in much of the present research are:

1. Constructs such as empathy, positive regard, congruence, transparency, attractiveness, expertness, and trustworthiness are different from one another in ways that affect the client. Otherwise, why should we discriminate between them?
2. The patterns of behavior that communicate various "facilitative conditions" are orthogonally related.
3. Raters who provide the raw data on such constructs as empathy, positive regard, attractiveness, expertness, and trustworthiness are reacting to the counselor in the same fashion as a client would.
4. Behaviors that are identified to be taught constitute the appropriate conditions that produce within-interview client change.
5. Trained observers who rate video tapes possess a constant internalized discriminatory criterion for each variable they rate.
6. Subject estimates of change reflect actual change that would occur.
7. Change that occurs within counseling will somehow generalize beyond the counselor's office and into the clinet's world.

All of these assumptions do not apply to each of the current research models. Nor is it presumed that all of the assumptions that do operate have been included in this list. However, every research model that is currently reflected in the literature is limited to some extent by these assumptions.

The important point to be made is that these assumptions make it very difficult for the researcher to show a relationship between the independent variables of counseling and the ultimate outcomes of counseling. Most of the research models are concentrating on what is happening within the counseling hour. This emphasis all but excludes what happens after the counseling hour. What is needed is a research model that 1) operates on less vulnerable assumptions; 2) includes both the interview setting and the client's environment; and 3) seeks to identify the independent variables that operate both within and outside of counseling.

It is true that some progress has been made in recent years in the identification of specific counselor behaviors, both verbal and non-verbal. Several recent studies are reported in which factor analysis has been used as a means of classifying counselor communications as they relate to empathy and positive regard and warmth. These studies suggest that there is a finite number of verbal response classes that the counselor uses. More importantly, these studies provide an empirical base for further studies.

Other research has attempted to describe the proxemic component of the counseling relationship and the nonverbal components of counseling (Dinges and Oetting, 1972; Widgery and Stackpole, 1972; Haase and Tepper, 1972; Hackney, 1972). These studies are significant in that they describe specific behaviors that may be operationalized, controlled, and manipulated as independent variables. We are moving quickly to the point where we can operationally define and control several behavioral components of the counselor's performance in an a priori fashion. This has significant implications for counseling outcome research.

Client Within-Interview Change:

If we can assume that client change in the interview is unlikely to occur spontaneously, then it is reasonable to assume that stimuli are producing the observed change. We shall further assume that to a very great extent, the intervening activities of the therapist are those stimuli that induce the change that the client is able to achieve.

Because the therapist is doing things, saying things, encouraging very specific things to happen, it is apparent that the client change that occurs is different from the client change that occurs outside the interview. It is largely therapist-controlled change.

Client Extra-interview Change:

Client change that occurs outside the interview may not be directly related to therapist interventions, although most research and related literature suggest a direct relationship. It is just as plausible to assume that the client has carried new behaviors or attitudes from the counseling hour that permit him to intervene as an operator on his environment, thus producing the extra-interview changes or outcomes. Indeed, if we think of direct casual relationships, those therapist stimuli which produce change within counseling are interview-bound unless the therapist follows the client into his environment and remains with him. It might be suggested by some that the therapist's influence follows the client and thus the therapist continues to be an independent variable. However, therapist "influence" is a client-controlled rather than a therapist-controlled variable. As a result we have not proved that interview-bound stimuli produce changes outside the interview. We have only assumed that such is the case.

A Model for Enabling Outcome Research:

A different set of assumptions about counseling outcomes can be made. Let us assume that what the counselor does in the interview is to produce the kind of change that makes it possible for the client to produce his own changes outside of counseling. The effect that the therapist's discriminative stimuli have over his client exists only as long as the therapist can manipulate stimuli. Once that contact is broken it is the client who manufactures the contingencies which stimulate change, perhaps in the same way the therapist does, although we don't know that the process is the same. Thus, the changes that are occurring outside the counseling

setting may be viewed as client-controlled change.

The model for conceptualizing client outcomes is, therefore, a two-stage model. The first stage which deals with the counseling interview treats counselor interventions as independent variables and client behavior as dependent variables. The change in client behavior can be measured against a yardstick of enabling objectives (see Zimmer, 1971). The achievement of these enabling objectives by the client introduces the second stage of our model. For in the second stage client behavioral change produced by counseling becomes the stimulus rather than the response and is used by the client to produce change in his environment (Hackney, 1973a). Thus counseling enables the client to become his own change agent and manipulator of contingencies in his environment.

From this model a number of researchable questions may be raised. These questions relate to the kind of criteria used in measuring outcomes, the effect of time upon client change, and the effect of interview-bound client change on client-controlled, extra-interview change, and questions related to therapist influence and control. A detailed discussion of the possibilities implicit in these questions is presented elsewhere (Hackney, 1972) and will not be developed further in this paper. However, there are other kinds of studies that need to be conducted if the enabling outcome model is to be implemented.

Areas of Related Research:

In their excellent review of the research that has been conducted on counseling outcomes, Hosford and Briskin concluded that "It would seem that researchers should be well beyond doing an experiment in which a

treatment, "counseling," is compared to something labeled a control group and in which some outcome criterion, say GPA, is used with no demonstrable relationship to whatever was done in the name of counseling" (1969, p. 203).

The point is well made that we need to move toward more specificity in our identification of independent variables. But, how specific have we been when we identify our treatment as "social modeling," "verbal operant conditioning," "systematic desensitization," etc.? Thoresen (1969) addresses the problem directly when he says "Terms such as systematic desensitization and behavior therapy are used as if they represent a single unitary set of operations--in fact, they describe a large, diverse and sometimes conflicting array of treatment methods and rationales (1969, p. 271)." It should be added to Thoresen's position that these strategies also include a complex array of behaviors, though little definitive research has been done to identify these behaviors. Consequently, a major initial thrust must be made toward generating descriptive research that identifies overt behavior that implements the various counseling strategies. Until this has been done, we cannot assume that verbal operant conditioning, social modeling, implosion, and other behavioral strategies are independent of the persons using them. In other words, even though we may have numerous studies that report the successful use of various specific strategies, we cannot discriminate between the strategy and the counselor using it as long as we do not know the behaviors implicit or explicit in the strategy and control for those behaviors.

Drawing upon our model of internal and external outcomes, several other research thrusts become apparent. These can be identified broadly as (a) research into identification of target behaviors; (b) research into the use of strategies designed to achieve enabling objectives; (c) research into the ways clients generalize or adapt within-counseling outcomes to extra-interview settings; (d) assessment studies of the effectiveness of client-initiated strategies; and (e) methods of assessing outcomes which are client-initiated.

Research Into Identification of Target Behaviors:

It is not difficult to view the interview as a place where the client equips himself to go and make changes in his life. It is difficult to get the client to identify, specifically and behaviorally, what changes he would like to have occur. We know that clients can be taught to think of their problems in terms of the relationships between what they do and how they feel (Hackney, 1973). We do not know all of the human variables that operate in this process. Research into this area would be highly productive.

Research Into Within-Interview Strategies:

A large portion of the creditable research in counseling has dealt with strategies the counselor uses to achieve enabling objectives. Few of these studies have attempted to describe the specific behaviors that constitute the strategies. Strategies such as assertive training, affect modeling, etc. should be the focus of descriptives studies with the ultimate objective being the definition of specific overt behaviors that can be manipulated experimentally.

Further research is needed in the pairing of strategies to specific types of client concerns. Finally, the call made by Hosford and Briskin

(1969) for multidimensional studies that include client characteristics, counselor characteristics and combinations of each remains a highly relevant objective. It is particularly desirable to begin studying specific situations in which a well-defined strategy doesn't work. We must begin to define the parameters of unsuccessful efforts by the counselor.

Research Into the Generalization of Within-Interview Outcomes:

We know very little about the transition the client makes from a counselor-controlled setting into his own client-controlled setting. While we may view the enabling outcomes of the interview as the tools or action plans that the client carries to his environment (Hackney, 1972), this conceptualization is incomplete until we can demonstrate how the client can implement what he has learned in settings that are independent of the therapy setting. We do not know what criteria influence the client to initiate a newly learned behavior rather than resorting to the old, habitual behavior he has used previously. We do not know how the client interprets the consequences of a newly learned way of responding. Thus, we do not know the extent to which the client can become a self-reinforcer as he tries to change his patterns of behaving. Finally, we do not know whether some enabling outcomes are more "usable" or generalizable than others.

Effectiveness of Client-Initiated Strategies:

Intensive research is needed into the nature and effectiveness of client self-monitoring strategies. Self-monitoring includes the application of behavior schedules, monitoring the occurrence of behaviors within these schedules, modification of schedules when appropriate, and achievement of extra-interview objectives. Client-controlled behavior schedules have been used effectively for weight control, modification of undesirable habits,

stuttering and other speech problems, etc. We need to study how this procedure can be expanded to include other types of client problems.

Another client-initiated and client-controlled strategy that needs further study is the use of "transfer therapy" procedures. By transfer therapy, we mean therapeutic encounters that are pre-packaged by the therapist, but selectively applied by the client in his environmental setting. An example of this would be audio-cassette recordings of relaxation exercises, assertive behavior reinforcement, etc. One clinical researcher at Purdue University (Ascough 1972) reports a therapeutic strategy which is conducted almost entirely by U. S. Mail using cassette tapes. His clientele consists primarily of phobic patients who are exposed to desensitization techniques specifically designed for them. The therapist and client meet once every two months (or more frequently, if necessary) and design the therapy strategies for the next eight weeks. We need to explore additional means by which clients may apply and monitor methods for controlling and changing their behavior.

While these are promising techniques, much systematic research is needed to identify the parameters of such techniques. This is precisely the kind of research that will ultimately permit us to study the link between within-interview change and extra-interview change, or counseling outcomes.

Methods of Assessing Counseling Outcomes:

The most perplexing aspects of the whole counseling outcome dilemma are the criterion problem and the methodology problem. By using target behaviors that the client would change, we are more likely to identify the

relevant criteria for change. Now we must identify methodologies that permit us to monitor change in target behaviors. We can include the client as recorder of data but we must also identify others in the client's environment who could provide data. The important point is that the typical "Do you think Tommy has changed lately?" kind of information is not very useful. Instead, we need objective, observational types of data from which we can draw inferences.

This calls for cumulative recording procedures that the client and significant others known to the client may use to report changes. Perhaps the client will be asked to wear a wrist counter that golfers use to keep their scores. He may tabulate the frequency of occurrence of desirable behaviors or feelings during the course of the day and then tranfer the total to a chart at the end of the day. Then he can plot his progress daily on the chart and bring the chart to the counselor at the end of the week to assess his overall progress and make modifications, if necessary. Incidentally, this method may be used to establish base line data prior to establishing extra-interview objectives. To reduce undesired behaviors, the client may wear a wrist alarm which he can use to determine the duration of time lapse between occurrence of undesired behaviors, e.g. smoking.

Others who are able to observe the client (parents, teachers, friends, etc.) may be solicited to assist in the therapeutic effort. The therapist can prepare behavior charts that these co-workers may use to record events of the client's behavior. When co-workers are utilized, the therapist must provide specific information on what they are to observe. He must also provide a means for recording behavioral events such that the task is minimally demanding on the observer.

Summary

By using a model of counseling outcomes which distinguishes between within-interview change and extra-interview change, we can begin to identify and study the counselor behaviors which constitute strategies or techniques. We must assess the relative productivity of these behaviors-within-strategies in terms of client change within the counseling setting. Next, we must clarify how these within-interview outcomes may be used by the client as tools or strategies with which he can operate upon his environment. In other words, how do these client changes transfer from the artificial counseling setting to the client's real world? We must examine what is involved when the client takes what he has learned about himself or what he has learned to do for himself and applies this knowledge to better manage the contingencies of his day-to-day living. This question is highly important for it is the relevancy question as well as the accountability question of counseling.

Still another salient feature of this research is the implication it has for the training of counselors. By bringing into focus the relationship between the counselor's behaviors and the outcomes of counseling, we may help trainees to recognize that they do have immediate and observable effects upon their clients.

Finally, it is sobering when we acknowledge how little we know about the relationship between what counselors do and the ultimate outcomes of counseling. The profession has made giant strides in the identification of specific counselor behaviors and how to train these behaviors. What remains is to show that these behaviors are related to the client's improved functioning in his environment.

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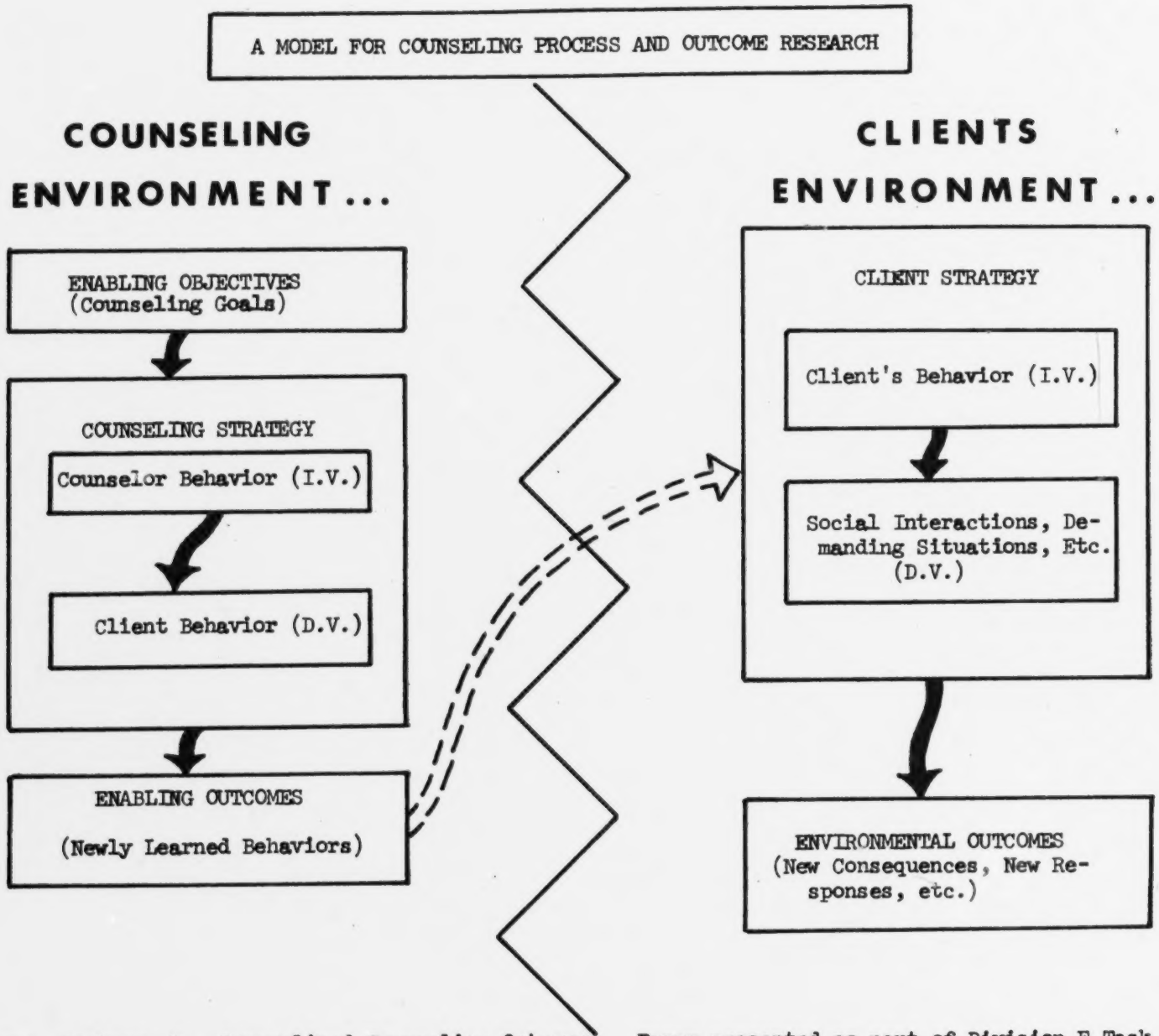

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